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# Sectarianism in Medicine—Distinctive Features of Existing Medical Sects.

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Read before the Practitioners' Club, Nov. 26, 1894.

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BY EDWIN J. KUH, M.D.  
CHICAGO.

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REPRINTED FROM THE  
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## SECTARIANISM IN MEDICINE—DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF EXISTING MEDICAL SECTS.

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The three sects recognized in the community in which we live are the regular profession, the homeopathic and eclectic.

In denoting the regular profession as a sect, I am conscious of a violation of the meaning of the term, sect. A sect is a body of persons who have separated from others in view of some special doctrine or doctrines. Now, the regular profession has no separate doctrine or doctrines, nor has it separated from anybody.

When you cut off a piece of a dog's tail, you do not cut off the dog from the tail, but the tail from the dog. For it is a fact well recognized by the profoundest experts of natural history, that it is the dog who wags the tail, and not the tail who wags the dog.

The regular profession has been stigmatized by certain apostates as the "old school." The spirit is the same as that of a man who designates the mother who has borne him, and given him life, and nursed him at her breast, and fostered and raised him, as the "old woman."

This idea of decrepitude and senility has been foisted upon the public and is given popular credence.

It appears to me, however, that the old school of medicine is, in spite of its age, rather frisky and vigorous. William Harvey, it must be confessed, has been dead for some time; and John Hunter and Edward Jenner, if they had lived, would unfortunately figure as gentlemen rather advanced in years and with a crick in the back. But, fortunately, the science they have enriched has outlived them.



Science is a mother of unlimited fecundity and vitality. Old as she is, she seems as far from her climacteric as when she was first born. At every age and every year this "old school" breeds new progeny, who bound into the arena and wrest new knowledge from the silence and mystery of the universe. Cruveilhier, Rokitansky and Virchow are her children who stood parent to pathology; Laennec and Skoda to physical diagnosis; Hebra to dermatology; Semmelweiss and Oliver Wendell Holmes to the most appalling menace to maternity; Helmholtz and Albrecht von Graefe, Czernak, Marion Sims, Jackson, Morton and Simpson, Lister, Charcot and Weir Mitchell, Koch and his pupils, each and every one became a leader and builder in his special domain.

The structure of medical knowledge, as that of all knowledge, will never become complete. The infinite vastness of science is its guarantee against stagnation and age. The medical body to which we belong forms a strong and indissoluble brotherhood with the natural sciences. We would defy any body of scientists to lay larger claims than ours upon Helmholtz. He belongs equally to us and to them.

Robert Mayer, the country physician, has given to physics the law of conservation of energy; and it was before a combined body of naturalists and physicians at Heidelberg, in the year 1889, that the much lamented Heinrich Hertz, of Bonn University, proclaimed his wonderful investigations on the unity of the phenomena of light and electricity, thereby giving the most brilliant experimental proof ever recorded in physics of the correctness of the purely mathematical doctrines of Thompson and Maxwell. In this manner does science enrich medicine, and medicine science.

Rational medicine, as we all know, has no dogmatic system and no pope. Whoever gives us knowledge that will bear the test of critical scrutiny is welcome. What we are after is the truth! We do not bow to authority. The rejection of tuberculin was none the

less emphatic because Koch fathered it. And Koch, who established a great principle of toxin effect, but no cure for tuberculosis, took a rest cure in Egypt and sat at the foot of the pyramids and gazed into the eyes of the sphinx.

How different with homeopathy. The stuffed prophet still lives, and his disciples bow before the fetich. Homeopathy stands or falls with its pope. No Hahnemann, no homeopathy! And still, how inconvenient this gentleman has become to his followers. His itch pathology and other paraphernalia have been discarded; his disciples with evasive eyes can be found in drug stores buying ounces of tabooed drugs, such as calomel, phenacetin, hypodermic tablets of morphia, etc., etc. The teachings for which their name stands have been renounced, but the name is still carried. And why is this done? Why is it that homeopathy, whose speedy extinction Oliver Wendell Holmes predicted fifty years ago, is still flourishing in this country at least? If homeopathy is a delusion why does it take people so long to find it out? The reasons are manifold but clear. Man is an animal who likes to be deceived. Everybody has a secret love for the marvelous. The marvelous is the most beloved child of faith.

A story is related of a bright young physician who strove for years, honestly but unsuccessfully, to acquire success. He was finally obliged to give up in sheer despair, and to masquerade as a quack. This brought him the success he had failed to acquire by legitimate means.

To most people their medical preference is a sort of physical religion; a religion of the body and of disease. They have the homeopathic creed because their grandmother had it or their neighbors have it. The doctor of their choice may have a lovely complexion or such charming manners, or may be a great light in the church.

“Unfortunately, among the guardians of our mor-

als, the ministers, are to be found the most ardent supporters of quackery in its various forms."

Then most of the calls which physicians receive are for minor ailments, which cure themselves under favorable conditions. Pellets or tinctures of an attenuation, which expressed in figures, exceed the most extravagant vagaries of a demented paralytic, are given under the pretense of effecting a cure. "During the entire course of the sickness, pellets and tinctures are faithfully administered; the attention of the patient is assiduously called to their use and imagined effect, and every improvement in his condition attributed to their influence."

Then there is, as I said before, the surreptitious substitution of rational drugs and doses for the homeopathic ones. The hypodermic syringe, in the hands of the homeopath, requires the same hypodermic tablet for the allaying of pain as we use. The homeopathic surgeon, oculist and obstetrician has, provided he possesses average intelligence, recourse to all the methods used by rational medicine. His affiliation with homeopathy, therefore, can only emanate from dishonest motives. He maligns his parent, disowns his name, but allows the parent to support him. They have been likened to medical highwaymen, who with one hand grasp the throat of the profession and with the other appropriate its possessions. If the theory of "*similia*" were really correct, which it has been abundantly proven not to be, it could be practiced by honest men under an honest name. I can, therefore, not recognize the slightest defense for homeopathy as a sect.

"Hahnemann, driven from the court of science, appealed to the people. His cause has been kept a popular one ever since. His disciples have ever avoided a scientific discussion of their doctrines. In view of these facts, how can an intelligent person or lover of true science countenance homeopathy for a moment? If he does, his conduct is indefensible."

With the riper experience of years of practice I



have become convinced, although I once held different views, that such recognition of homeopathy as meeting practitioners of that system in consultation is an indorsement of their absurd doctrines and an inconsistent practice. It is to be supposed, also, that those who thus compromise themselves have some motive other than pure benevolence or tolerance.

It does not bespeak well for the intelligence of the American public in medical matters, that homeopathy has received such general recognition and broad encouragement in our country. In Germany, where the medical profession stands probably on the highest level, a homeopath is so rare a phenomenon as to form a promising nucleus for a dime museum. There are no homeopathic schools in Germany, and but one in Great Britain. In Great Britain and Ireland with their 35,000,000 inhabitants there are but 275 homeopaths. The United States, however, are a perfect hotbed of this quackery. It is computed that one-eighth of our practitioners are homeopaths.

The faith in homeopathy must, therefore, be considered a remarkable anomaly of our century. It is a superstition of equal mental obliquity as the belief in witchcraft, in Perkin's Tractors, in the divine right of kings, in the infallibility of the Pope or in the Democratic party.

We shall now proceed to a consideration of the distinctive features of the last existing medical sect, namely, the eclectic. The very few eclectics with whom I am acquainted wear a long beard and ride down town on a bicycle. An eclectic is, therefore, a gentleman with a long beard, who rides down town on a bicycle. In addition to this he is supposed to treat both by rational medicine and by irrational medicine, namely, homeopathy. Or, in other words, "you pay your money and take your choice."

I can not conclude these remarks without saying some uncomplimentary things about the regular profession. One of the most pernicious practices of the

regular profession is excessive medication. Most of us have accustomed the public to consider a prescription the equivalent for a fee. When a patient consults us we are supposed to dive into our pockets for prescription blanks. This absurd practice injures the patient, injures the profession, helps the homeopath and increases the so-called silent majority.

Then there is another point: Those men to whom is intrusted the education of the thousands of young men who are newly created physicians, are not always guided by the highest motives. Our medical colleges are in a large measure responsible for the existence of those medical scalpers who hover around the limbo of our sacred profession under the name of homeopaths and eclectics, or even regular physicians. Our students are graduated with some capacity for good and a great capacity for harm. It was a favorite saying of Billroth's that it was his highest ambition to educate students to such a level that they could not do any harm. "*Non nocere*" is the device which should be inscribed upon the banner of medicine. Raise your standard of medical education and you will crush out medical sects.

NOTE.—I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to Dr. W. W. Brown- ing, from whose article, "Modern Homeopathy," I have quoted.



